

Meeting Minutes  
Amherst Historical Commission  
Wednesday, May 19, 2021  
6:30 PM

Meeting held via Zoom platform

Called to order at 6:32pm

Commission Members: Jane Wald, Chair, Patricia Auth, Robin Fordham, Hetty Startup, Jan Marquardt (joined late at 7:15)

Staff: Ben Breger, Planner

Commission Chair Jane Wald called the meeting to order, took attendance, instructed members of the public on how to raise their hand and give public comment and read a statement outlining the structure for the public hearing.

#### PUBLIC HEARING

#### **90 Memorial Drive (17A-18) Maya Marx and Nicholas Dufresne – Demolition of circa 1947 wood frame single-family residence.**

Property owners Maya Marx and Nicholas Dufresne presented their application. They have owned the property for a few years and had planned for renovations but a pipe burst this winter and caused extensive damage. They'd like to demolish the building and start over with a new building or just leave the area vacant. They live on Hillcrest Place behind this house and could use this area for additional land.

Planner Ben Breger explained that this water damage and additional septic issues are issues the Town is aware of and have been documented. Breger showed pictures of the interior water damage and building exterior. The home is from the 1950's and is ranch style.

Marx explained that the Town notified the owners the pipes had burst after seeing water coming out of the garage. The hard wood floors have buckled and the house has mold.

Fordham asked how other Commissioners felt about the historical significance of mid 20<sup>th</sup> century buildings.

Startup noted how the house is nicely situated on the cul de sac and utilizes the drop in slope well to incorporate an auto garage.

Marx added that there's no one living in the house because there are septic issues and the house is not attached to Town sewer due to a shallow soil line.

No Public Comment was offered about this property.

Fordham asked if the Commission has ever placed a condition to encourage the salvage of historic materials.

Wald responded that this condition has been made before by the Commission.

The Commission then proceeded to go through the criteria for Historical Significance.

- The building is not listed on, nor is it within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Place.
- Fordham, Startup, and Wald expressed that the building exemplifies social and cultural heritage (13.4103) given it's importance in post World War II housing typologies.
  - Voted 3-1 in favor
- Fordam, Auth, Wald, and Startup expressed that the building portrays the environment of a group of people in an era of history characterized by a distinctive architectural style (13.4110; 4-0 in favor)
- Startup and Auth expressed that the 3 houses in this cul de sac do reflect post war housing as found in 13.4121 (2-2 in favor).

Building determined to be significant based on Historical Importance 13.410 and Architectural Importance 13.411

The Commission then discussed whether the building should be preferably preserved

Fordham expressed that the building is not rare and is in very poor condition

Breger reminded the Commission that the criteria for preferably preserved is the loss of the building would be a detriment to the heritage of the community.

Commission members expressed that the loss of a post-war house would be unfortunate but that the loss would not be detrimental.

Fordham moved that the Commission allow the issuance of a demolition permit at 90 Memorial Drive. Auth seconded the motion. The vote was 4-0 in favor of the motion.

Wald, Fordham, Startup and Auth voted in favor. (Marquardt not present)

**20 Ball Lane (5A-56) Carl and Theodore Matuszko – Demolition of former automobile and truck repair garage and farm stand.**

Roy Johnson, the real estate agent for the property owner, presented the application.

Johnson explained that the business had moved to Hadley and the buildings need to come down because they are unsafe.

Breger showed photographs of the buildings from the application submitted.

Johnson expressed that there had been someone living at the farm stand building as of 6 months ago but the building is in very rough condition.

Fordham asked what year the building was from and Johnson estimated it was from the 1950's.

Startup asked for clarification about what the property was contiguous with and whether it was near any trails or conservation areas.

Wald invited Public Comment

Meg Gage, direct abutter across the street from 20 Ball Lane, expressed concern and alarm about the brownfields problems at this location. Gage expressed that the buildings are an eye sore but was unsure how the pollution would be cleaned up.

Lyons Witten, LSP with OHI Engineering, and resident of Pioneer Valley CoHousing expressed he was an interested buyer of the property in the last few years and agreed that the buildings have little historic value and are unsafe. Witten asked whether the locations of the floor drains could be marked when the buildings are taken down so that the pollution can be located after the demolition has occurred.

Tom Crossman, owner of a small management company in Amherst called Crossman Properties and a former resident of the 20 Ball Lane farm stand for nearly 6 months, expressed that the owners are improving the property by taking these buildings down. Crossman stated that the buildings are functionally obsolete and there's no way to reuse them and that repair would be significant.

Johnson explained they have done a partial 21E environmental assessment on the property. They were advised by attorneys that whoever buys the property would have to do their own 21E assessment so there's no sense in the owners paying for that now if it would have to be done again. The owners are committed to doing this the right way and cleaning up the environmental issues.

The Commission then proceeded to go through the criteria for Historical Significance.

- The building is not listed on, nor is it within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places.

- All Commission members agreed there was no historical importance to the buildings (13.410)
- All Commission members agreed there was no architectural importance to these buildings (13.411).
- All Commission members agreed there was no geographic importance to these buildings (13.412).

The buildings at 20 Ball Lane were not found to be significant as none of the 13.4 criteria were met.

Marquardt moved that recognizing no criteria for significance were met, that the Commission authorize the issuance of a Demolition Permit by the Building Commissioner. Auth Seconded the Motion. The vote was 5-0 in favor of the motion (Wald, Auth, Startup, Marquardt, Fordham).

Breger noted that he would pass along information to the Building Commissioner about the conversations heard tonight regarding environmental concerns at this property.

**599 East Leverett Road (3B-71) Donna and Marvin Spence – Complete demolition of circa 1850 farmhouse most recently used as rental property**

Marvin and Donna Spence, the property owners, presented the demolition proposal. The building had been a rental and is in disrepair and that they'd like to take it down.

Breger discussed the application that the building had been used as a rental since 1972 and was built around 1850. At the site visit, Commission members did note that the building was in rough condition and the electric had been disconnected from the building.

Marquardt added that there is 1.5 story in the front original building with a central chimney mass but that it has been changed and rooms reconfigured around it over the years. There is an additional 2 story structure attached to the east and all are in very poor condition.

Auth agreed that the building has been stripped of historical significance.

Breger shared images of the structure from the site visit.

Spence added that the building foundation is in very rough condition.

Wald opened Public Comment and there was none offered.

The Commission then proceeded to go through the criteria for Historical Significance.

- The building is not listed on, nor is it within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places.

- Commission members agreed that there is historical importance to the building due to the social and historic heritage of these types of farm houses (13.4100; 5-0 in favor)
- All Commission members agreed there was no architectural importance to these buildings (13.411) because the house has been changed so much and the distinct architecture has been lost.
- All Commission members agreed there was no geographic importance to these buildings (13.412).

The building at 599 East Leverett Road was found to be significant based on criteria 13.4103 Historical Importance.

Marquardt moved that the Commission allow the issuance of a demolition permit at 599 East Leverett Rd. Auth seconded the motion. The vote was 5-0 in favor of the motion. Wald, Fordham, Marquardt, Startup and Auth voted in favor.

**462 Main Street (14B-68) John Wroblewski – Complete demolition of circa 1828 wood frame structure, known as the J.T. Wescott House (Amh.440), most recently used as an office building.**

Wald introduced the application and commented that the owner had submitted many documents and reports regarding this proposal.

John Wroblewski, property owner, Kristine Royal, architect, and John Wallen, architectural engineer, presented the application.

Wroblewski explained that he and his wife bought the property in 2017 and developed plans for the mixed-use building currently under construction and got permission to remove the rear garage from this Commission. The intention was to keep this building and to repair issues with the sagging floors so it could be used. Wroblewski has since gotten opinions from other builders and architects that the structural integrity of the building is failing. The sill plates are in poor condition and tilting to the outside. The repairs made in 1980 to place good beams in the basement had since decayed as there were still dirt floors and issues with beetles.

Wroblewski noted that the building is listed in the Railroad Depot District of the Massachusetts Historical Commission and he intended to save this historic building. He put in a lot of money into the building, such as HVAC, insulation, and cementing the basement floor.

Putting more money into the building is not going to fix the structural issues and renting out the building is a liability given the trip hazards, the slanted floors, mold, and low ceilings. The estimate was \$250-300,000 to repair the building and would require a lot of demolition and reconstruction within the building.

Wallen commented on the structural floor issues. The floor joists and sills are so rotted that the house has sunk quite a bit and the studs are likely touching the foundation. Moving this building would be very difficult as there is nowhere from which to lift it and would be too precarious. Wallen fears that the walls have been rotted and that there could be a collapse; the foundation is near collapse right now as well.

Breger commented on the history of the building. JT Westcott was the original owner from 1850-1888, an Amherst businessman in the palm leaf hat business and first director of First National Bank of Amherst. More recently, Robert Garvey owned the house, an Amherst Select Board member and Hampshire County Sheriff from 1984-2016. Breger then showed historic maps of the area showing an 1873 map of Amherst. Marquardt noted that these show the wraparound porch was added by 1916.

Auth noted that the reports provided to the Commission helped give appreciation on the status of the building.

Fordham asked about whether the Commission should consider architectural salvage for parts of the building.

Startup asked Wallen to comment on moving the building. Wallen said that moving the building would be very difficult and would require further study. He would recommend lifting the building by the second story which is not practical, nor economical.

Wald asked what items could be salvaged. Fordham noted that the windows and glass door knobs had historical value. Marquardt also remarked on the windows and the details on the front porch posts. Marquardt remarked she was disappointed to see this building proposed for demolition given its prominence on Main Street but understood that the building was in very poor condition.

Wald invited Public Comment.

Tom Crossman, current commercial tenant of 462 Main St, spoke to the condition of the building. His office began on the north side of the house and has since moved to the middle office. He and his staff members experienced respiratory symptoms and some became ill due to the poor air quality and moisture in the basement. They have since moved to the front office space. Finishing the basement floor has improved air quality but the building is still in very rough shape. They are planning to leave the building for another office space. Crossman remarked on the historic nature of the building but acknowledged that the building is deteriorating and that is in the best interest of the community that the fatigued facility be taken down.

Hilda Greenbaum spoke that she thought the house was important for Irish heritage in Amherst but had not done the research to confirm this. She would love to see the house saved and is heartbroken that it would be lost. She has always known it as the Garvey House.

Auth made a motion to close the public hearing and Startup seconded the motion. 5-0 in favor.

The Commission then proceeded to go through the criteria for Historical Significance.

- The building is not listed on, nor is it within an area listed on, the National Register of Historic Places.
- Commission members agreed that there is historical importance to the building due to the social and historic heritage of the building and area (13.4103; 5-0 in favor)
- Commission members agreed there is architectural importance to the building (13.410, 13.411).
- Commission members agreed there was geographic importance to the building given the prominence on Main St (13.412).

The building at 462 Main Street was found to be significant based on criteria in 13.4.

Fordham asked about a condition on the demolition encouraging architectural salvage.

Marquardt made the following motion: 462 Main Street has been determined by the Historical Commission to meet all 3 criteria of historical, architectural, and geographic importance and is therefore deemed a significant building. However, based upon its current conditions and the best efforts of the owner to save it, it seems to be in too poor a state to warrant further investment. The Commission would like to add a condition to approval of the demolition request that every effort be made to salvage and repurpose any features that remain reusable.

Auth seconded the motion.

Wald agreed that the circumstances were unfortunate and she appreciated Mr. Wrobleski's efforts to save and repair the building and to entice others to buy or relocate the building.

Wrobleski offered that he would try and reuse the capstones as sitting benches in his new property and that he would look to salvage materials as best he could.

The Commission voted 5-0 in favor of the motion, authorizing the demolition of 462 Main Street. Startup, Wald, Marquardt, Fordham, and Auth voted in favor.

## PUBLIC MEETING

### 1. Announcements

2. Approval of Minutes- Final meeting item: Revised minutes from 22 Jan 2020, 24 June 2020, 22 July 2020, 26 Aug 2020, 19 Oct 2020, 9 Dec 2020, 27 Jan 2021, 10 Feb 2021. Moved by Marquardt and seconded by Auth: unanimous vote to approve.

3. Jones Library Historic Preservation Restriction-discussion tabled to next meeting

4. Civil War Tablets Site Visit

5. West Cemetery Headstone Restoration Planning

6. Discussion of 11-15 East Pleasant St Building-Chris Brestrup reported from Tree Warden, Alan Snow, that construction would probably kill all but two of the trees along the fence in the western border of West Cemetery. Marquardt asked Brestrup whether she could return to Snow and inquire whether the same would be true if the variance on the Pleasant Street building setback to only 5 feet not be granted by the Planning Board.

7. Discussion of Zoning in the B-L District-Business-Limited District: Preliminary discussion: There are six in Amherst, three in the center of town. The two addressed by the Town Council—via the Planning Board and CRC—for zoning changes to increase higher-density development are from Hallock St. to Cowles Lane and on Triangle Street around the banks and pizza place. BL designation is as a transition zone between 5-story and 3-story buildings. Some of the building in the first district mentioned as historically significant (old houses converted into business spaces)

Suzannah Fabing-Muspratt, member of the public, commented that the first district is not just from Cowles to Hallock but from Cowles to McClellan. These include many 19thC buildings, retaining a sense of what the town looked like in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century and making a nice street edge along Kendrick Park which refers to the historical neighborhood behind. The first block—to the south—is all owned by one developer; the second block has three houses, all with different owners. Proposal from Planning Department would encourage tearing down the entire blocks and putting up monolithic buildings of three or four stories. The BL is “transitional” but she doesn’t believe this means height so much as usage, i.e., these were residential buildings repurposed to businesses and services. She would like to see if there were a way to save these buildings and construct the desired density *behind* them, in the open areas currently used as parking and later miscellaneous additions. She has worked with Pam Rooney to propose a vision of how this might look and they offer sketches to the town committees for consideration, asking that this drive very careful planning, taking into account all the options.

Breger clarified that the Town Council sent a directive to the Planning Board to look at removing Footnote B requiring minimum lot area per dwelling unit to limit development. The Planning Department thus started to look at a new overlay for the BL as a way of exploring options. This could include design guidelines eventually as well.

Wald remarked that it is all reminiscent of the Form Based Zoning discussion a few years ago.

Marquardt linked the way that current attempts to create an almost zero lot line for 11 Ea Pleasant is how developers try to maximize lot coverage and it could set precedents.

Auth reiterated how important the street scape in those two block on the west side of Ea Pleasant is to Amherst and hopes anyone selling property there would come to our Commission.

Marquardt worried that by that point, all we can do is delay demolition. Fears that if that side of Ea Pleasant were developed to look like the other side, there would be a revolution among Amherst residents.

Wald agreed and said the historic buildings in those two block increases the value of Kendrick Park.

Fordham pointed out that this is the sort of concern that a Local Historic District might be the tool to address.

Everyone agreed this would be a good idea to get going in advance of any further movement toward demolition of these old houses.

Breger mentioned that there is already a Local Historic District Committee in place.

Muspratt explained that when they worked on getting the N. Propect/Lincoln/Sunset District established, they talked about including those blocks on Ea Pleasant but were afraid if they did, developers would block the entire proposal. It was a long process with 200 properties.

It was decided to form an Ad Hoc committee to spearhead the process for LHD application around these two blocks. Hetty Startup and Pat Auth were nominated and will begin to explore how to initiate an application.

Wald suggested a joint meeting with the LHD committee.

Breger suggested the Triangle Street area is no longer historic and could perhaps become the focus for development instead. The one on Ea Pleasant abuts the N. Propect/Lincoln/Sunset District and could either be appended to it or proposed as new and separate.

It was noted that there is still an open seat on the Local Historic District Committee as well as two on our Commission.

Muspratt suggested if one takes this on, to continue north into the next block up until No.

Pleasant because there stand the original St. Brigit's Church, another Russell Putnam house, etc. Not currently under threat but would make sense to protect it as well.

8. Public Comment- Hilda Greenbaum commented on the N. Propect/Lincoln/Sunset District application not including these blocks on Ea Pleasant as well; her son owns buildings along there and hopes they can block any aggregate sales to development. There is also now the Community for Better Planning, the CBP, that is active.

9. Unanticipated Items-Marquardt asked for an update on Bylaw revision: was supposed to be taken up by both the Planning Board and the CRC but at both meetings they ran out of time so they will discuss and send us initial feedback soon, then it goes to Town Council who reviews and sends back to Planning Board and CRC for a joint hearing to formalize their recommendation before holding a public hearing.

Fordham asked Breger whether the grant application for the plant survey as part of the historic walk on the Mill River proposal should skip the June 1 deadline and wait for October 1 deadline—they agreed and it will appear on a future HC agenda.

10. Next Meeting Date-June 16, 2021 @ 6:30.

Marquardt moved and Auth seconded a movement to adjourn at 8:53 p.m. All in favor.

ADJOURNMENT